

History 4485

U.S. Politics since 1900

Spring 2009

Instructor: Dr. Dan Williams
Office Hours: TLC 3225
MW, 1-5
(and by appointment)

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Course website: www.westga.edu/~dkwillia

Class Location:
Pafford 208
MWF, 10-10:50

Description:

This course will explore the history of national politics from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. We will focus on four central themes throughout the semester: presidential policy and leadership, the development of modern conservative and liberal political ideologies, changes in the national party system, and significant national elections. You will discover the reasons why political parties shift their positions on important issues, and why certain issues become part of the national political agenda. This course will give you a chance to explore the arguments that twentieth-century American political thinkers made for both liberalism and conservatism. It will also give you a more informed perspective on the American presidency, because you will have the opportunity in this class to analyze the policies of every president from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

In short, this class will take you inside the smoke-filled rooms of political convention halls and the nation's capitol, behind the scenes of the nation's election campaigns, and inside the Oval Office to discover how the American political system works and the forces that determine the outcome of the nation's political debate.

Classes will consist mainly of interactive lectures and class discussions. I encourage all students to participate by asking questions during lectures and making comments in discussion sessions. Six classes will be devoted entirely to discussions of the reading material, and the lecture-based classes will include some discussion time, as well.

Learning Outcomes:

This course will help students develop critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze opposing points of view, and it will also give them the knowledge that they need to evaluate contemporary political issues. By the end of this semester, they will have learned about the origins and assumptions of modern liberalism and conservatism, and

the way in which the nation's major political parties have evolved to accommodate the interests of American voters. They will gain practice assessing the effectiveness of presidential policies. This course will help them to become better informed voters by giving them the historical information that they need to interpret the nation's political debates and evaluate policy proposals.

This course will also help students to improve their writing, research, and communication skills.

Assessment:

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Midterm exam	15%
Book analysis	15%
Research paper	30%
Class participation & emails	20%
Final exam	20%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

Grading Methodology: This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A- / B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision. In computing final course grades, I convert all grades into numeric scores according to the following system:

A = 95

A/A- = 94

A- = 92

A-/B+ = 90

B+ = 88

B+/B = 87

B = 85

B/B- = 84

B- = 82

B-/C+ = 80

(A similar pattern is used for grades in the C-range and D-range).

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C. A grade average of 59.5, which converts to a D, is the lowest possible passing grade in the course.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade on an essay assignment, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and the ability to synthesize information from a

wide variety of sources, as well as an accurate understanding of the material and good writing technique. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of the assigned documents, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain factual inaccuracies, errors in interpretation, inadequate use of the assigned documents, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

D-range and failing grades are assigned to work that fails to meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

Exams: There will be one midterm exam and a take-home final exam. The midterm exam will consist of essay questions and I.D. terms based on concepts covered in the lectures, discussions, and readings. One week before the exam, I will post a study guide on the course website that will give you more information about the material covered on the test. I will give a make-up exam only in cases of a pre-arranged, excused absence for which documentation must be provided, or in cases of a legitimate health or family emergency that must be documented with a doctor's note, dean's note, or similar measure of proof. In all other cases, a make-up exam will not be an option.

The take-home final exam will give you a choice of several broadly-based essay questions relating to themes covered in the course readings and lectures throughout the semester. After receiving these exam questions on Wednesday, April 29, you will have until Wednesday, May 6 to write two 4-6 page essays in response to the questions of your choice.

Book analyses and research papers: You will be expected to write one 4-6 page essay in response to one of six questions based on some of the assigned books in this course. The questions and due dates for the essays are listed in the book analysis guidelines on the course website.

You will also be expected to write one 8-10 page research paper for this course. Consult the online guidelines for research papers for more information about this assignment.

Papers that are turned in after the assigned date will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are overdue.

It should go without saying that all papers that you write must be your own work, and that any students who are caught plagiarizing another student's work, a paper from a web site, a textbook, or any other source will automatically fail this course and may be subject to further disciplinary action. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will not be tolerated. Please look at the course website to find guidelines on proper footnoting procedures and avoiding inadvertent plagiarism.

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester.

Class participation: Classes will consist of interactive lectures, which will give you a chance to ask questions and discuss the ideas presented in the readings. In addition, there are six class periods reserved for discussion of the assigned books. It is very important for you to read these books prior to the class discussions so that you can come to class prepared to participate. Failure to attend these discussions will adversely affect your class participation grade. I do not have a formal attendance policy, but since students cannot participate in class discussions if they do not attend class, habitual absences, as well as habitual silence in class throughout the semester, could negatively affect a student's class participation grade.

In addition, as part of your class participation, you should email me short summaries of each of the six books that we discuss in class. These emails should consist of at least two paragraphs that briefly summarize the book and suggest at least one intriguing question for class discussion. Each of these emails is due at 8am (two hours prior to class) on the day on which we are scheduled to discuss the book in question. I will not assign these emails a letter grade, nor will I evaluate them on the basis of grammar or structure, but I will instead treat them as I would comments that you make in class, and I will consider their content when I formulate class participation grades at the end of the semester.

Class communication: I may send out periodic email communiqués to students in this course, so please check your UWG email account regularly. The university administration has stipulated that all email communication between faculty and students should take place on UWG email accounts, so please use your UWG email account for all electronic communications that you send me.

University policy also prevents me from disclosing grades over email, so if you would like to discuss your grade on any assignment in the class, please set up an appointment to meet with me in my office. Please do not email me with a request for your grades, since I am not allowed to email that information to you.

To protect students' privacy rights, I will not return graded papers or exams to any third party (e.g., a student's friend or relative who asks to pick up a student's work on that person's behalf) unless a student gives me permission in writing (e.g., an email) to do so. There are occasions when I must disclose a student's grade to university administrators, other history department faculty (e.g., the department chair), or athletic coaches who need

to know the academic status of students on their team, but in all other cases, I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of students' grades.

I would like to do whatever I can to help you succeed in this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a question about any subject pertaining to this class. I make it a priority to respond promptly to emails from students, and I am happy to talk with students during my office hours, so please feel free to stop by my office to introduce yourself and discuss any concerns that you may have about this course. I believe that this will be an excellent semester, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this class.

Required readings:

The following texts are available in the university bookstore, and are required:

Allida M. Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism*

Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative*

Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era*

Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*

Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents*

Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities*

Class Schedule:

- 1/07 Introduction to American Political History
- 1/09 Gilded Age Politics
- 1/12 Progressivism at the State and Local Levels
- 1/14 Theodore Roosevelt: The Crusader
- 1/16 Progressivism at the National Level
- 1/19 No class (MLK Day)
- 1/21 **Book discussion: Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities*
(Email summary due at 8am)**
- 1/23 The Progressive Regulatory State: An Evaluation
- 1/26 From TR to Wilson via Taft and the Election of 1912
Research paper topic due
- 1/28 Woodrow Wilson: The Moralist
- 1/30 The Republican Twenties
- 2/2 Herbert Hoover's Approach to the Depression
- 2/4 The New Deal: The Policies
Research paper source list due
- 2/6 The New Deal: The Political Impact
- 2/9 Opposition to the New Deal
- 2/11 The Roosevelt Presidency in Peace and War
- 2/13 Postwar Liberalism
- 2/16 **Book discussion: Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow*
(Email summary due at 8am)**
- 2/18 Harry Truman's Fair Deal
- 2/20 The Cold War: From Truman to Kennedy

- 2/23 Eisenhower's Centrist Politics
- 2/25 John F. Kennedy's New Frontier
- 2/27 The Politics of Civil Rights
- 3/2 **Book discussion: Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism*
(Email summary due at 8am)**
- 3/4 Lyndon Johnson's Great Society
- 3/6 The Political Impact of the Vietnam War and the New Left
- 3/9 The Election of 1968
- 3/11 **Midterm Exam**
- 3/13 Film: *The Candidate* (1972)
(Note: This is a 110-minute film that will run from 10:00-11:50)
- 3/16-3/20 – Spring Break
- 3/23 The Origins of a New Conservatism
- 3/25 **Book discussion: Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative*
(Email summary due at 8am)**
- 3/27 Richard Nixon: Remaking the GOP
- 3/30 Richard Nixon: Abuse of Power
First draft of research paper due
- 4/1 Gerald Ford and the Crises of the 1970s
- 4/3 The Presidency of Jimmy Carter: The American "Malaise"
- 4/6 The Election of Ronald Reagan
- 4/8 Reagan's Economic Policies
- 4/10 Reagan's Legacy
- 4/13 **Book discussion: Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution*
(Email summary due at 8am)**
- 4/15 George H.W. Bush: The Last Republican Moderate

- 4/17 Bill Clinton: New Democrat
- 4/20 Clinton, Gingrich, and the Polarized Politics of the 1990s
- 4/22 Neoconservatism and the Presidency of George W. Bush
Research paper due
- 4/24 The Election of 2008: Was It a Realignment?
- 4/27 **Book discussion: Obama, *The Audacity of Hope***
(Email summary due at 8am)
- 4/29 Contemporary Political Challenges and Their Historical Context
Take-home final exam essay questions distributed
- 5/6 **Take-home final exam essays due at 12pm**